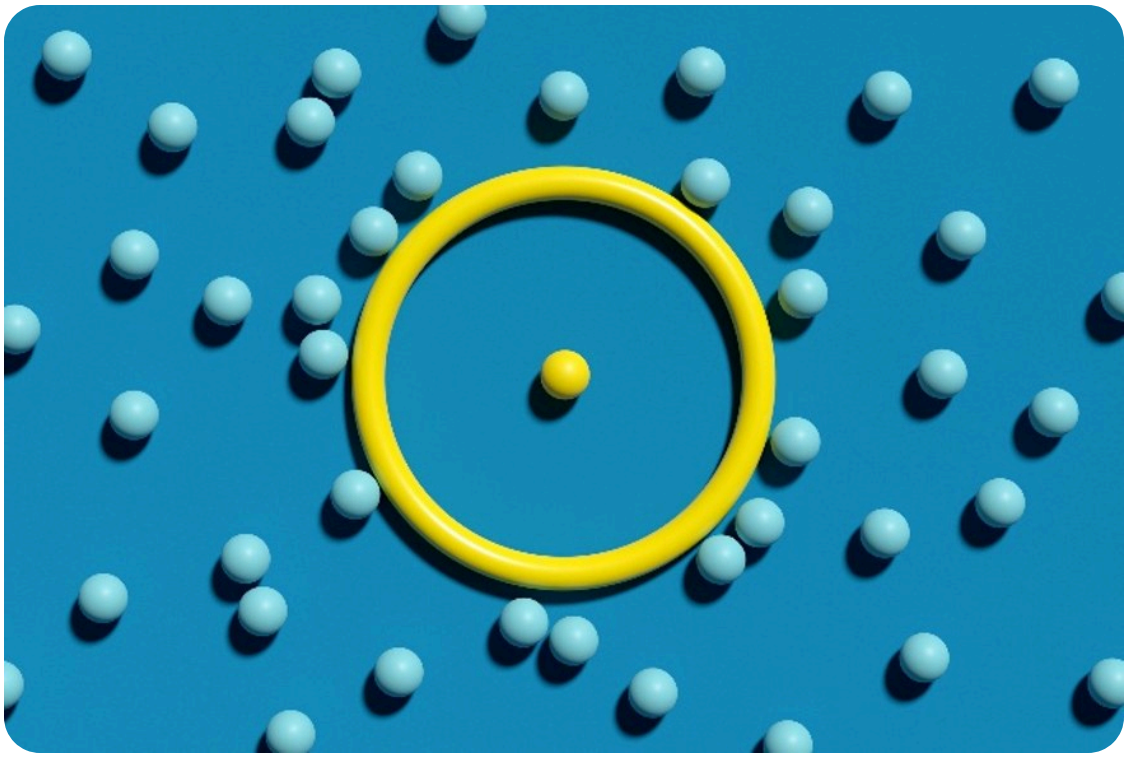


Setting Boundaries

A Biblical and Christian Guide for Teens

If you need help right now. If you are having thoughts of hurting yourself, please tell a trusted adult right away. You can also call or text 988 (the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline), or text HOME to 741741 (Crisis Text Line). This guide is educational and does not replace professional support when it is needed.

Why This Matters

Boundaries are often mistaken for selfishness or a lack of love, when they are what makes real relationship possible. Knowing where you end and someone else begins, and communicating that clearly, protects both people. Without boundaries, relationships tend to drift toward resentment on one side or control on the other.

“Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed” (Mark 1:35, NIV), even while crowds were still looking for Him. “Let us go somewhere else... so I can preach there also. That is why I have come” (Mark 1:38, NIV) shows Jesus choosing His purpose over meeting every demand placed on Him. Boundaries were part of how He lived, not a failure of love.

A Heart-Level Invitation

Consider: do you say yes to things you do not want to do because you are afraid of disappointing someone or starting a conflict?

“Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ” (Galatians 1:10, NIV) draws a direct line between people-pleasing and losing sight of what you believe is right.

Signs You Might Struggle with Boundaries

Directions: Notice which of these apply to you.

I say yes when I want to say no
I feel resentful after agreeing to something I did not want to do
I apologize excessively when I state a need or limit
I avoid conflict even when something matters to me
I feel responsible for other people's feelings or reactions
I let people repeatedly cross a line I have asked them not to cross
I over-explain or justify my limits instead of stating them plainly
I feel guilty resting or saying no
I give in when someone pushes back on a boundary I set
I take on other people's problems as if they were my own
I keep pushing after someone has already told me no
I pressure people until they give in to what I want
I get upset or sulk when someone sets a boundary with me

What a Boundary Is and Isn't

What a Boundary Is

A boundary is a clear statement about what you will and will not do, accept, or participate in. It describes your own behavior and choices. It is something you control.

What a Boundary Isn't

A boundary is not punishment, the silent treatment, or an attempt to control someone else's behavior or feelings. Having limits is not selfish. It is what makes a relationship sustainable for both people in it.

How to Set a Boundary

Know What You're Protecting: your time, your energy, your values, or your safety. Name it specifically before you try to explain it to someone else.
Say It Clearly and Calmly: a boundary works best stated plainly, without over-explaining or excessive apology.
Expect Pushback, and Hold the Line Anyway: people who benefited from your lack of boundaries may resist the new one. That resistance does not mean the boundary is wrong.
Boundaries Are About You, Not About Controlling Them: you control your own actions and responses. You cannot force someone else to change, and a boundary does not require them to.
Practice on Small Things First: build the skill with lower-stakes boundaries before facing the harder ones.
If someone does not like your answer, they likely will not like or respect your reasons for it either, no matter how carefully you explain them. Over-explaining a boundary rarely convinces someone who was resistant to it in the first place. Many people who push back on a boundary will target the reasons behind it, not because the reasons are weak, but because overturning your reasoning is a way of trying to overturn the decision itself. Recognizing this pattern makes it easier to hold a boundary calmly, without feeling required to win an argument you were never going to win.

Respecting Other People's Boundaries

Boundaries work in both directions. You have permission to say no, and so does everyone else, including friends, family, and people you are close to. Pushing past someone's no, pressuring them until they give in, or treating their limit as a puzzle to solve rather than a decision to respect damages trust the same way it would if the roles were reversed.

“So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you” (Matthew 7:12, NIV) applies as directly to boundaries as to anything else. Respecting someone else's limit, even when it disappoints you or costs you something you wanted, is part of what it means to love them well.

Boundaries and Your Faith

Prayer: ask God for wisdom about where a boundary is needed, and for courage to hold it once it is set.
A Trusted Mentor: a youth leader or other Christian adult can help you practice saying a boundary out loud before you need it in the moment.
Scripture: Mark 1:35–38 and Galatians 1:10 are worth returning to, especially before a hard conversation.

Getting Started

Name one relationship or situation where you need a boundary. Write down, in one sentence, what that boundary would sound like if you said it out loud.

Noticing What Is Strengthening

Directions

Read each statement and select the response that best fits how this has been for you recently.

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1. I say yes to things I do not want to do because I am afraid of conflict or disappointing someone.

1 2 3 4 5

1 Never · 2 Rarely · 3 Sometimes · 4 Often · 5 Always

2. I can name specifically what I need to protect: my time, energy, values, or safety.

1 2 3 4 5

1 Never · 2 Rarely · 3 Sometimes · 4 Often · 5 Always

3. I state a boundary clearly, without over-explaining or excessive apology.

1 2 3 4 5

1 Never · 2 Rarely · 3 Sometimes · 4 Often · 5 Always

4. I notice when someone is arguing against my reasons in order to overturn my decision itself.

1 2 3 4 5

1 Hardly at all · 2 A little · 3 Somewhat · 4 Quite a bit · 5 Completely

5. I hold a boundary even when someone pushes back against it.

1 2 3 4 5

1 Hardly at all · 2 A little · 3 Somewhat · 4 Quite a bit · 5 Completely

6. I recognize the difference between a boundary and trying to control someone else.

1 2 3 4 5

1 Never · 2 Rarely · 3 Sometimes · 4 Often · 5 Always

7. I practice boundaries on smaller things before facing harder ones.

1 2 3 4 5

1 Hardly at all · 2 A little · 3 Somewhat · 4 Quite a bit · 5 Completely

8. I bring my need for a boundary to God in prayer.

1 2 3 4 5

1 Strongly Disagree · 2 Disagree · 3 Neutral · 4 Agree · 5 Strongly Agree

9. I have a trusted adult who helps me practice setting boundaries.

1 2 3 4 5

1 Hardly at all · 2 A little · 3 Somewhat · 4 Quite a bit · 5 Completely

10. I feel guilty when I set a boundary, even a reasonable one.

1 2 3 4 5

1 Strongly Disagree · 2 Disagree · 3 Neutral · 4 Agree · 5 Strongly Agree

Why Consistency Matters More Than Intensity

One firm boundary in a hard moment does not fix a whole pattern, and one time caving under pressure does not undo progress already made. Boundaries are a skill practiced repeatedly and held consistently, not a single decision made once.

“Let your ‘Yes’ be yes, and your ‘No,’ no” (James 5:12, NIV) describes a consistency worth building. A boundary that changes depending on who is pushing back is not much of a boundary.

A Prayer to Begin

> “Lord, give me wisdom to know where I need boundaries, and courage to set them clearly. Help me stop confusing people-pleasing with love, and remind me that saying no to some things is how I say yes to what matters most. Amen.”

Six Practical Guidance Principles

1. Know What You're Protecting

Name specifically what needs protecting before trying to explain it to someone else.

2. Say It Clearly and Calmly

A plainly stated boundary needs no lengthy justification.

3. Expect Pushback, and Hold the Line Anyway

Resistance to a new boundary does not mean the boundary is wrong.

4. Boundaries Are About You, Not About Controlling Them

You control your own actions. That is enough.

5. Practice on Small Things First

Build the skill before you need it for something harder.

6. Let Your Yes Be Yes and Your No Be No

Consistency is what makes a boundary trustworthy, to you and to others.

A Closing Encouragement

Boundaries are not selfish. They are what makes real love and real relationship possible. Even Jesus, who loved perfectly, still stepped away, still said no to some requests, and still protected time for what mattered most.

Suggested Resources

For those who want to go deeper, these resources offer additional insight into boundaries and healthy relationships:

> Cloud, H., & Townsend, J. (1992). Boundaries: When to Say Yes, How to Say No to Take Control of Your Life. Zondervan.

> Townsend, J. (2006). Boundaries with Teens. Zondervan.

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